

**MY BODY.
MY DECISION.
MY RIGHTS.**

Reducing Child, Early and Forced Marriage
in Sierra Leone and Burkina Faso

Gender Equality Assessment Report
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Acronyms

ASRHR	adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights
CEFM	child, early and forced marriage
FGD	focus group discussion
FSU	Family Support Unit
KII	key informant interviews
SRHR	sexual and reproductive health and rights
STI	sexually transmitted infection

1 Executive Summary

Introduction: Save the Children is implementing a project (in 2020-2023) entitled "My Body. My Decision. My Rights: Reducing Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM)" in the Hauts-Bassins and Cascades regions in Burkina Faso and the Kailahun and Western Rural districts in Sierra Leone.

i. Background

Purpose of the Project: The purpose of the project is to reduce CEFM, enable girls to make decisions on their own future and fulfil their equal human rights by addressing the underlying normative conditions which maintain gender inequality and making alternative opportunities more accessible and meaningful for girls.

Report objective: The overall objective of this work is to conduct a gender equality assessment to understand the root causes, contributing factors, and consequences of CEFM, gendered power dynamics, and the current institutional capacities working to address CEFM and adolescent pregnancies in the two countries

Methods: The following methods were used for this project, with 5 different guides developed:

- Photovoice (followed by interviews (15-18 years) or focus groups (10-14 years)) with unmarried adolescent girls
- Interviews with adolescent married girls and their partners (separate interviews were held, but they were part of a marital network)
- Interviews (15-18 years) and focus groups (10-14 years) with unmarried adolescent boys
- Focus groups with mothers and fathers of unmarried adolescent girls
- Interviews with leaders (local government, girl/women leaders, and religious/traditional leaders)

Data Collection and Analysis: In Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone, data collection took place February 15 to 26, 2021. Twelve (12) focus groups (with 60 people) and 60 interviews were conducted in Burkina Faso. In Sierra Leone, 8 focus groups (with 48 people) and 60 interviews were conducted. Data from the focus groups and interviews were transcribed into the local language first and then translated into French (Burkina Faso) and English (Sierra Leone) by local staff. The consultant used NVivo for Mac to support the thematic coding and analysis of the English qualitative data. Analysis was country-specific as well as examining cross-country key themes emerging from the data, including based on the objectives and tools, and by group, as well as in-vivo coding as new themes arose. Patterns and common themes were identified across sources and differences in responses between and across groups. Limitations include the time for Photovoice, securing consent for photos, the challenges of asking interview and focus group questions in local languages, opportunities for additional probing, and some participants in Sierra Leone feared reprisal taking part given the topic of CEFM.

ii. Findings: Burkina Faso

Decision-making on marriage: Respondents across groups note that it is often the father, or a male in the father’s family (e.g. brother) that makes the decision about marriage for a daughter given his role as head of the household. A few respondents state that it is sometimes the mother is also involved in this decision. Many children feel they cannot go against their parent’s wishes when it comes to decisions like marriage, as they have to be obedient. However, some fathers argue that it is the mother of the daughter that makes decisions alongside the daughter when it comes to marriage. In terms of influence over this decision for marriage, some younger and older unmarried adolescent girls and boys feel that they have a say in the decision of who they are to marry, while others feel they do not have a choice but have to follow what their parents decide. Some of the married adolescent girls state that it was their idea to get married, as they were in love with their partners, and many were no longer in school.

The main influencers of CEFM and adolescent pregnancy: Respondents identified a number of influencers to CEFM, including a girl getting pregnant (or concern about a girl getting pregnant outside of marriage), a girl’s “behaviour” including not attending school or going out late at night with men, having physical characteristics that indicate a girl has reached maturity, a belief that is able to care for her family, poverty, various cultural practices including traditions involving agreements and promises within the family (including “cossèguè”), or between families, to marry (even before the girl child is born), the use of plants, medicines, and potions to convince someone to marry you (and their use connecting with kidnapping or abductions in forced marriages), marriage following circumcision, and religion and tradition.

Male and female roles: In many cases it is the man who makes decisions on having children, how many children to have, and the use of contraception. Men also make the decisions on income generation and expenses, as they are the head of the household and the ones who typically generate the income. The husband is responsible for buying food and clothing for the household, and paying for medical expenses. It is the woman’s role to take care of the children including washing and dressing them, as well as to wash dishes, clean the house, sweep, and prepare food, and get water and firewood. Men are generally not involved in household activities, although a few note that they help when the woman is sick or if she is pregnant.

Knowledge, attitudes and practices on CEFM: Unmarried adolescent girls (aged 10-14 and 15-18) generally identify CEFM as having many challenges and few advantages. Challenges identified include living a life in poverty, being beaten by your husband, having to do difficult housework, not being able to play with your friends, having to drop out of school, having childbirth complications, your husband taking another wife, limited job prospects, and even suicide. On the other hand, these girls feel that if you stay in school and avoid getting married before 18 years of age, you could start your own business, and have a successful family life. These girls also identify assets and goods, like cars, houses, gas stoves and even eggplants, that they could purchase if they stay in school and are able to get a good job, and not get married or pregnant before they are 18. They also state that they can then help their parents by purchasing these items for their parents as well. Most unmarried adolescent boys wanted to finish school before they got married, and find a job that they could support their wife and children. Some of the boys noted that CEFM results in much suffering for the girl, including childbirth complications. Some of the boys felt that a 16-year old girl being forced to marry by her parents had options like talking to her parents, going to

the police, or running away. However, not all the boys agreed that this was a forced marriage, and a few thought she had to accept the marriage since her parents told her she had to get married.

Some married adolescent girls cite having children as a positive outcome of being married young. One said “there is nothing positive”. Some also note that there is nothing negative about being married young. However, others mentioned lack of mobility, their in-laws, the other wife, or the hard work involved. Partners of married adolescent girls also mention children as a positive in their marriage, as well as the wives doing the household chores. There were respondents across other groups, including parents and religious leaders, who felt that child marriage was justified even as young as 15 years of age, particularly if the girl was not in school, she was not listening to her parents, and thus to avoid pregnancy outside of marriage.

Religion is also a reason provided by some for CEFM.

Access to SRHR information and services: Some older unmarried adolescent girls stated that they had no barriers to accessing SRHR, and that no one is stopping them from accessing these services. Other unmarried adolescent girls say they are not accessing these services because they are not old enough yet. However, some have questions on these services, including how to avoid getting pregnant. It is difficult to pay on their own as costs are high, and people may feel ashamed to access these services. In some cases, parents will not allow unmarried girls to access these services as they feel the girls should not be having sex. Some of the mothers of adolescent girls said they will support their daughters in accessing contraception, if this means she will stay in school and not get pregnant. However, some of these mothers were also concerned that using contraception would lead to their daughters being promiscuous. Fathers of unmarried adolescent girls generally do not support the use of contraception because of side effects or that it will lead to promiscuity. One father however noted that the girl could discuss this with the mother. Most adolescent boys say they have no challenges to accessing SRHR services, or do not access these services. It is noted that boys can also purchase condoms in stores. However, one boy said the challenge was getting medicines for certain illnesses (presumably sexually transmitted infections (STIs)).

Married adolescent girls, and mothers of unmarried adolescent girls, note that their husbands are a major barrier for married women who may want to use contraceptives, as the husbands often want more children and they are concerned that women on contraceptives will have sex with men other than their husbands. However, they also note that it is the woman, not the man, who suffers if she has more children than planned.

Health care workers do not always treat these SRHR services confidentially, and may tell other community members about the services that an adolescent is accessing. Shame in accessing services was noted as a concern across different groups. Some respondents across different groups also worry about the side effects of taking birth control as they hear from others that the use of contraception can be problematic in terms of causing sickness, increasing the ability to have children later, or leading to complications in child birth later.

National policies, strategies and institutional capacities: There is a mixed understanding of the laws on CEFM. Some people claim that they are not aware of a law banning CEFM in Burkina Faso, or there is a lack of awareness about the law. Communities also partake in traditional

marriage (versus marrying at the town hall where marriages are registered with the government). This makes it challenging for the government to enforce the laws on CEFM. Organizations working on advocating against CEFM that were identified by leaders include government, NGOs, the police, and teachers.

In terms of who they might report to if they heard about a child marriage, different respondents varied in terms of what they would do. Responses varied from doing nothing and accepting the marriage, talking to the parents, talking to the girl, reporting to the police, or telling her to run away. Whether this is reported or not can depend on factors such as the girl child being in school and being “behaved”. Still others did not view CEFM as an issue, as they support child marriage, and hence would not report this to anyone.

The leaders interviewed noted that girls do not necessarily have to drop out of school when they are pregnant, although some do. The father of the child may also pay for the schooling for the girl. After giving birth, the girl would need someone to watch the baby to attend school. There are some supports, such as income generation activities and literacy training from a few organizations, for girls who are young mothers.

iii. Findings: Sierra Leone

Decision-making on marriage: Generally, respondents noted that it is the father that makes the decisions about marriage for the daughter. Sometimes, the mother is also involved. However, children do not want to go against their parents’ wishes in general. On the other hand, some unmarried girls felt that they had power in the decision to decide who to marry, and that they will wait until their schooling is done and they are older to get married. Similarly, some older unmarried boys felt that they could make the decision of who to marry, with their parents input, while others felt the parents had the last word on the matter. Very young adolescent boys felt that they did not have a say and their father (or parents together) would make the decision for them.

Boys also want to wait until they are done their schooling before marriage, and until they have a job and are able to support their wife and children. In general, the married adolescents noted that it was their father or parent’s decision that they were married, because they were pregnant. These girls generally did not feel ready to be married, but since they were pregnant, they had no choice. Many wanted to continue with their schooling. In a few cases the girl said that she herself made the decision to marry. One factor in this decision was peer pressure to get married given other friends her age were getting married and having children. Poverty in the girl’s family also played a role in the decision to get married.

Main influencers of CEFM: The main influencers of CEFM identified in the interviews and focus groups were: poverty, being obedient to the parent, disco dances/social clubs/nightclubs (leading to “behaviour” that results in pregnancy), trying to avoid the girl getting pregnant before marriage as she has reached puberty, being pregnant, the girl not attending school, secret societies (Bondo for girls and Poro for boys), cultural practices and customs (e.g. gifting children, marrying the husband of the late elder sister, use of charms, chiefs raising a girl and then marrying her), and television/movies/social media.

Male and female roles: Typically, it is the man who decides when to have sex, when to use family planning, and whether to have more children. Decisions on spending money are often made by

the man, although women may be involved in these decisions. There are mixed opinions from adolescent married girls on whether income generating activities are done solely by the husband, or by both the husband and wife. Decisions to go to the health facility might be taken by the man (since he often controls the spending), but in other cases, others say it is the woman who can decide to go to the health facility. Doing household chores is mainly a woman's role, including cooking meals, cleaning and sweeping, washing dishes, washing clothes, getting water, and taking care of children (bathing, changing the baby, and feeding). In many cases, men may assist with some chores, such as feeding children or getting water. Fetching firewood may be done by men or women, but is often cited as being done by the men in Sierra Leone given what men say are the physical difficulties of this task. The role of the man is to financially support the household, including the wife and children. He provides shelter, food, and clothes.

Knowledge, attitudes and practices on CEFM: Young adolescent girls felt that life was more difficult if you get pregnant young and/or have to be married young, as you will suffer in terms of lack of food, lack of medicine, lack of support from your husband, the husband taking another wife, not being able to move freely, and having to leave school. In addition, childbirth will bring complications. Some of the girls also note the shame surrounding getting pregnant early, and therefore having to marry early. On the other hand, these girls noted that if you are married later, than you are better able to care for your children, and also pay school fees to end the cycle of CEFM. Many note that they will have jobs if they marry later. Some of these girls also identify that if they stay in school, and do not get married young, they will be able to help their family and their community.

There is varying opinion about what is positive from child marriage amongst adolescents who are already married. Some say there is nothing positive and they are suffering, while others state that they are not suffering and that their husbands are taking good care of them. However, many negative aspects are identified, including having to do (difficult) farm work, dropping out of school, her husband not providing basic necessities, being physically beaten by her husband, being cheated on, and having trouble accessing medical services for herself or her child.

Many of the fathers of unmarried adolescent girls do not want their daughters to be married before they are 18 years of age. A number mentioned the importance of educating the girl child. Some fathers note that if the girl is in school, they will support her to stay in school and not have her married. However, if she gets pregnant, then she will not be supported and will have to be married. Other fathers said that the daughter will have to be married once she reaches the age of marriage as this is part of their religion.

Unmarried adolescent boys identified a number of challenges with CEFM. The boys noted that violence and maltreatment from her husband, difficulties in childbirth, lack of food, and having to drop out of school were all issues that a 16-year-old being forced to marry faces. However, a few boys feel that a 16-year-old girl should go along with the marriage, either to honour her parents or if she is not in school.

Access to SRHR information and services: Some respondents mention there are no barriers for sexual and reproductive health information and services. These respondents note that Marie Stopes provides services through a vehicle that comes to communities. Many unmarried adolescents said

they were not accessing these services and were abstaining. In other cases, lack of money to purchase contraception is a challenge, as is lack of availability of products for unmarried people. Before marriage, parents are cited as a challenge to accessing contraception for girls, as they will not allow you to use contraceptives, as you will be seen as wanting to have sex or even as being a prostitute. However, the alternative is that some girls may seek alternate sources of contraception that are not reliable, such as withdrawal or getting contraception from the “quack doctor”. In a couple cases, boys mentioned being asked questions if they try to buy condoms or try to access medication for STIs. Money can also be a challenge for boys. They then resort to alternative medicine for STIs.

Others (including married adolescent girls and mothers of adolescent girls) cite that barriers include the husband deciding on the use of contraception, and that he expects her to have children, so will not allow contraception. Some people, including a few married adolescent girls and fathers of adolescent girls, feel that they should not take contraception, as people should be having children. Men and women across all groups cite concerns about the negative side effects of contraception that they have heard about.

National policies, strategies and institutional capacities: While there is law against child marriage in Sierra Leone, there is a difference of opinion on whether this law is adequately enforced, with some leaders saying that it is enforced, and others saying that deals are made so that there is no penalty. There is also a difference in opinion on whether people are aware of this law or not, with some people saying they are aware, including given Fatima Bio’s (Sierra Leone’s first lady) work in this area. For some people, leaders note that the fear of breaking the law and being charged and fined is a deterrent to CEFM.

The responses to what people will do if they see a child marriage happening varies across respondents, and is not consistent within groups of respondents. Some would report it to the authorities, including the parents, leaders, Family Support Unit (FSU), Save the Children, or the Ministry of Social Welfare worker. On the other hand, some said that they would speak to the child, or to her parents, to try to convince them to change their minds. Others would do nothing as they feel it is not their business, or they cannot do anything. There is also a concern that they will face backlash if they report. Some are not aware to whom they should report.

Leaders were also asked whether girls can stay in school if they are pregnant. They noted that girls can stay in school while pregnant (by law), but many are ashamed to do so. Leaders were also asked if there are any supports for girls who are pregnant or girls who are young mothers; there is a lack of community-level support for girls who are pregnant or are young mothers.

iv. Recommendations

#	Recommendation
1	Involve program participants in changing attitudes and behaviours regarding traditional gender norms and beliefs.
2	Shift program participants' attitudes from an instrumental rationale to include a human rights rationale for CEFM.
3	Increase awareness across all stakeholder groups on what constitutes forced marriage.
4	Engage community champions, religious leaders, males, and females of all ages early on in the project to ensure buy-in.
5	Address broader issues of poverty and education and their link to CEFM.
6	Ensure accurate information on sexual and reproductive health and access to sexual and reproductive services without fear of shame or stigmatization.
7	Ensure parents are supported in soft skills on parenting, and adolescents have communication skills to have discussions with their parents on difficult topics like CEFM.
8	Ensure supports for girls who are pregnant or are young mothers.
9	Balance open discussions on CEFM with enforcing legislation.

2 Introduction

Save the Children is implementing a project (in 2020-2023) entitled "My Body. My Decision. My Rights: Reducing Child, Early and Forced Marriage (CEFM)" in the Hauts-Bassins and Cascades regions in Burkina Faso and the Kailahun and Western Rural districts in Sierra Leone.

2.1 Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the project is to reduce CEFM, enable girls to make decisions on their own future and fulfil their equal human rights by addressing the underlying normative conditions which maintain gender inequality and making alternative opportunities more accessible and meaningful for girls.

2.2 Objectives of the Gender Equality Assessment

The overall objective of this work is to conduct a gender equality assessment. The assessment captures the voices and opinions of project beneficiaries and key stakeholders (with a focus on women and girls). This assessment ensures that in-depth contextual qualitative information is outlined, including on the root causes, contributing factors, and consequences of CEFM, gendered power dynamics, and the current institutional capacities working to address CEFM and adolescent pregnancies in the two countries. Specifically, the gender equality assessment examines:

- The power dynamics at the household and community levels, particularly around girls' decision-making power of with, whether or when to get married or have a child;
- Distribution of resources at the household level (access to and control over resources);
- Roles and responsibilities of women, girls, men and boys;
- Cultural and religious taboos, myths and beliefs;
- Knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights (ASRHR), and CEFM;
- Access to ASRHR information and services;
- Identification of the main influencers (positive or negative) for CEFM and adolescent pregnancy; and
- National policies, strategies and institutional capacities addressing CEFM

3 Methodology

The following methods were used for this project, with 5 different guides developed:

- Photovoice (followed by interviews (15-18 years) or focus groups (10-14 years)) with unmarried adolescent girls
- Interviews with adolescent married girls and their partners (separate interviews were held, but they were part of a marital network)¹
- Interviews (15-18 years) and focus groups (10-14 years) with unmarried adolescent boys
- Focus groups with mothers and fathers of unmarried adolescent girls
- Interviews with leaders (local government, girl/women leaders, and religious/traditional leaders)

¹ Samuels, F., et al. *Doing qualitative field research on gender norms with adolescent girls and their families*. 2015 November 20, 2016]; Available from: <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9809.pdf>.

Tools were translated into local languages as appropriate. Please see Appendix A for the guides.

Prior to the commencement of any interview or focus group, participants over the age of 18 were read the consent form and asked to sign if they agreed. Participants under 18 years of age were asked to sign an assent form, and their parents signed a consent form. Please see Appendix B for the forms.

To keep the conversation rich yet manageable, focus group discussions (FGDs) had approximately 6 participants each. Trained local staff led the focus groups and interviews, with one responsible for facilitation and one responsible for note taking. Interviews and groups were kept as homogenous as possible (e.g. the moderator and the notetaker were the same sex as the focus group or interview participants), to ensure participants felt comfortable sharing their perceptions. Focus groups and interviews were audio-recorded if participants agreed to ensure capturing of in-depth data. In addition, detailed notes were taken by a notetaker.

3.1 Photovoice

For Photovoice, the process that was followed was:

1. **Day 1 (1/2 day in the a.m.):** A meeting was held with participants to explain the research, get informed voluntary consent, provide them with cameras, and teach them how to use the cameras (including “how to orient the camera, how to turn the camera on and off, which button to press to take a photo, how to zoom in and out, how to keep the camera steady to avoid creating blurry images, and how to review the photos that they had taken”).² The group was then also provided with the topic area for their photo assignment. In the case of the current research, the assignment was to take photographs that showed:
 - a. What life is like if you are married when you are young (under 18 years old) versus if you are married when you are older?
 - b. How would things be different if you are married when you are young (under 18 years old) versus if you are married when you are older?
 - c. What would your role be if you are married young versus married when you are older?
 - d. What would your husband’s role be if you are married young versus married when you are older?
 - e. What challenges would you face if you are married young versus if you are married when you are older?
 - i. This could include areas such as access to sexual and reproductive health services (including contraception), childcare, household chores, education, employment or accessing your own income.
2. **Day 2 (full day – plus the afternoon from Day 1):** The group was then given time to take pictures. In the case of the current research, given time limitations, they had one day to take photos (plus the time from the afternoon following the training Day 1). The staff also checked in with the girls on Day 2 to ensure they understood the assignment and answer any questions.

² Sutton-Brown, C.A., *Photovoice: A Methodological Guide*. Photography and Culture, 2014. 7(2): p. 169-185 (p. 175).

3. **Day 3 (1/2 day):** Interviews (15-18 years of age) or focus groups (10-14 years of age) were then held on Day 3 to review the photos and to discuss the photos. See the guide for detailed questions asked, but the questions were based on the PHOTO acronym tested and used in other Photovoice projects:
 - “PHOTO: Describe your Picture, What is Happening in your picture? Why did you take a picture Of this? What does this picture Tell us about your life? How can this picture provide Opportunities for us to improve life?”³

3.2 Other Tools Used to Encourage Discussions

Tools, techniques or questions were used to elicit more detailed responses in the interviews and focus groups, including: a division of labour/role charts⁴ and ideal wife/husband (for married adolescent girls and their partners) and vignettes⁵ (for unmarried boys aged 10-14 and 15-18).

For the division of labour/role charts, respondents were asked to identify what the role of men and women are in different areas (e.g. household chores, sexual relations, decision-making). They were also asked about what makes an ideal wife and an ideal husband.

For the vignettes, unmarried adolescent boys were read a vignette about a 16-year old girl, who is writing a letter to get advice from an Auntie (advice columnist), as her parents have decided that she has to be married. The boys were then asked a series of questions about this letter.

3.3 Sampling and Recruitment

The criteria for recruitment are outlined in the Table below.

³ Hergenrather, K.C., et al., *Photovoice as Community-Based Participatory Research: A Qualitative Review*. American Journal of Health Behavior, 2009. **33**(6): p. 686-698 (p. 693).

⁴ International HIV/AIDS Alliance, *Tools Together Now! 100 participatory tools to mobilise communities for HIV/AIDS*. 2006, International HIV/AIDS Alliance. https://www.aidsalliance.org/assets/000/000/370/229-Tools-together-now_original.pdf?1405520036

⁵ International HIV/AIDS Alliance, *Tools Together Now! 100 participatory tools to mobilise communities for HIV/AIDS*. 2006, International HIV/AIDS Alliance. https://www.aidsalliance.org/assets/000/000/370/229-Tools-together-now_original.pdf?1405520036

Table 1: Selection Criteria

Target group	Total number of FGDs	Selection Criteria
Married older adolescent girls (15-18 years old)	6 interviews in each region/district (12 interviews total per country)	Married (legally or just cohabitating but considered married) and some who have at least one child under 5 years old.
Male partners of married adolescent girls	6 interviews in each region/district (12 interviews total per country)	Based on the criteria of the girls; male partners of the girls identified above.
Unmarried older adolescent girls (15-18 years old)	6 interviews in each region/district (12 interviews total per country)	Be unmarried and between the ages of 15-18.
Very young adolescent girls (10-14 years old)	1 FGD in each region/district (2 FGDs total per country); 6 girls each group ⁶	Be unmarried with no children and between the ages of 10-14.
Unmarried older adolescent boys (15-18 years old)	6 interviews in each region/district (12 interviews total per country)	Be unmarried and between the ages of 15-18.
Very young adolescent boys (10-14 years old)	1 FGD in each region/district (2 FGDs total per country); 6 boys each group	Be unmarried with no children and between the ages of 10-14.
Parents of adolescent girls (adult men and women)	2 FGD in each region/district (1 for women and 1 for men - 4 FGDs total per country); 6 each group	Have an unmarried adolescent girl at home between the ages of 10-18.
Religious leaders/ Traditional leaders/elders	4 (1 woman and 1 man per district/region)	Male and female religious or traditional leader. If difficulty to find women that fit this category, look for influential female elders.
Local government officials	4 (1 woman and 1 man per district/region)	Representatives from ministries responsible for gender equality, women and girls' empowerment, CEFM, child protection, or family and child well-being. Ideally those working on/responsible for gender equality and CEFM at the district/regional level.
Women and girl leaders	4 (1 woman and 1 girl per district/region)	Women and girl leaders who occupy leadership positions in organized community groups.

⁶ Note as per Table , in Burkina Faso, it was decided to add an additional focus group in each region/district for 10-14 year old boys and girls for in-school and out-of-school.

Save the Children offices in each country undertook recruitment prior to data collection.

3.4 Training for Data Collection

Save the Children staff in the Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone offices, as well as partner organizations, were trained by the Canadian-based consultants by Zoom for four-3 hour sessions in February 2021. The training included research methods and ethics, gender-responsive data collection, safeguarding and protection from sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA), as well as facilitation and transcriptions. Practice sessions were also held following the trainings, led by staff in each country.

The Canadian consultant also reviewed early transcripts (from the pilot or the first interviews/focus groups) and provided feedback. She was also available during data collection to debrief or troubleshoot any issues with the focus groups and interviews as needed.

3.5 Data Collection

All data collection was carried out directly by Save the Children staff or partner organizations that had been trained.

In Burkina Faso, data collection took place February 15 to 26, 2021. In Sierra Leone, data collection also took place February 15 to 26, 2021.

Table 2: Data Collection – Burkina Faso

	Cascades	Hauts-Bassins	Total (per method)
Married older adolescent girls (15-18 years)	6 interviews	6 interviews	12 interviews
Male partners of married adolescent girls	6 interviews	6 interviews	12 interviews
Unmarried older adolescent girls (15-18 years)	6 interviews	6 interviews	12 interviews
Very young adolescent girls (10-14 years)	2 FGDs (3 participants each) (one in school and one out of school)	2 FGDs (3 participants each) (one in school and one out of school)	4 FGDs (12 participants)
Unmarried older adolescent boys (15-18 years)	6 interviews	6 interviews	12 interviews
Very young adolescent boys (10-14 years)	2 FGDs (6 participants each) (one in school and one out of school)	2 FGDs (6 participants each)	4 FGDs (24 participants)
Parents of adolescent girls (adult men and women)	2 FGDs (6 participants) (one with mothers and	2 FGDs (6 participants) (one with mothers and	4 FGDs (24 participants)

	Cascades	Hauts-Bassins	Total (per method)
	one with fathers)	one with fathers)	
Religious leaders/Traditional leaders/elders	2 interviews (one male, one female)	2 interviews (one male, one female)	4 interviews
Local government officials	2 interviews (one male, one female)	2 interviews (one male, one female)	4 interviews
Women and girl leaders	2 interviews	2 interviews	4 interviews
	12 focus groups (60 people) and 60 interviews		

Table 3: Data Collection – Sierra Leone

	Waterloo	Kailahun	Total (per method)
Married older adolescent girls (15-18 years)	6 interviews	6 interviews	12 interviews
Male partners of married adolescent girls	6 interviews	6 interviews	12 interviews
Unmarried older adolescent girls (15-18 years)	6 interviews	6 interviews	12 interviews
Very young adolescent girls (10-14 years)	1 FGD (6 participants)	1 FGD (6 participants)	2 FGDs (12 participants)
Unmarried older adolescent boys (15-18 years)	6 interviews	6 interviews	12 interviews
Very young adolescent boys (10-14 years)	1 FGD (6 participants)	1 FGD (6 participants)	2 FGDs (12 participants)
Parents of adolescent girls (adult men and women)	2 FGDs (6 participants) (one with mothers and one with fathers)	2 FGDs (6 participants) (one with mothers and one with fathers)	4 FGDs (24 participants)
Religious leaders/Traditional leaders/elders	2 interviews (one male, one female)	2 interviews (one male, one female)	4 interviews
Local government officials	2 interviews (one male, one female)	2 interviews (one male, one female)	4 interviews
Women and girl leaders	2 interviews	2 interviews	4 interviews
	8 focus groups (48 people) and 60 interviews		

3.6 Data Analysis

Data from the focus groups and interviews were transcribed into the local language first and then translated into French (Burkina Faso) and English (Sierra Leone) by local staff.

The consultant used NVivo for Mac to support the thematic coding and analysis of the English qualitative data.⁷

Analysis was country-specific as well as examining cross-country key themes emerging from the data. Structured coding was conducted based on the objectives and tools, and by group. Once coded, nodes were examined to identify patterns and common themes across sources and differences in responses between and across groups. In-vivo coding was also conducted for new themes emerging. Throughout this process, themes related to Save the Children's areas of interest as outlined above were the focus of the analysis.

3.7 Limitations

Photovoice: Photovoice is a method that can garner detailed, in-depth responses while also providing a sense of empowerment to the person taking the photos. However, there are also some limitations to Photovoice. The main limitation identified in the field was the amount of time it took to do the training and then check-in with participants, then conduct the interview and focus groups. Some respondents mentioned having difficulty obtaining consent from people to take their pictures. In many cases, girls took pictures of pregnant or young mothers (under the age of 18) – for future work, it should be clarified not to take pictures of these young pregnant girls or young mothers, as this can feel shaming.

Asking questions in local languages: It is noted as a challenge to ask questions in the local language to ensure that in-depth responses are achieved. Some transcripts were quite short (with one interview lasting only 14 minutes for example), and did not have a lot of detail. More probes could have been used in some cases. However, other interviews or focus groups lasted a long time (e.g. one focus group lasted 150 minutes), and given the number of people involved in interviews and focus groups, and that many common themes were identified, it is felt that saturation was reached in most areas of investigation despite these limitations.

Ensuring Open and Honest Discussions: It is important when conducting interviews and focus groups on sensitive topics that people feel free to be open and honest in their responses. While one cannot know for sure the level of openness and honesty from respondents when collecting data of any nature, whether qualitative or quantitative, including sensitive topics such as CEFM and SRHR, there are indications in the data that people felt open to discuss. For example, some people noted that it was acceptable to marry before 18, others talked about serious issues they faced (e.g. being beaten by their husbands)⁸, and many talked about cultures and customs related to CEFM (e.g. secret societies, the role of religion). In addition, triangulation of the data across methods (Photovoice, interviews, focus groups) and across sources (different age groups, boys and girls, parents, leaders) helps to ensure that the data collected reflects the varied opinions in communities.

Fear of Reprisal: In Sierra Leone, facilitators noted (and it was also identified in a couple transcripts) that they feared reprisal by taking part in the interviews and focus groups, as can be seen in the quote below from a participant (partner of a married adolescent girl):

⁷ Auerbach, C.F. and L.B. Silverstein, *Qualitative Data: An Introduction to Coding and Analysis*. 2003, New York: New York University Press.

⁸ Referral forms were used in the interviews to ensure that participants were referred to appropriate resources as needed.

Yes, the only thing I'm telling you is that I don't [want] you to tell anyone that you engaged me in any discussions because when you called me some big people told me not to tell you anything and I answered, so before coming here I took my cutlass and told them that I was going to my farm. They think that you want to know everything that is happening here so you will take them to the law. (Partner of adolescent girl)

However, given the responses that were provided (including people who stated it was acceptable to marry when you were under 18), it seems that these concerns did not necessarily affect the data collected. All staff involved in data collection signed confidentiality forms, and it will be important for Save the Children staff and other organizations working with Save the Children to ensure people feel safe to discuss and engage in the project given some of these concerns.

4 Overview of participants

As per Table 4, in Burkina Faso, the average age of the married adolescent girls that were interviewed was 17.4, while their partners reported average age was 33.6. Eight of the 12 girls had children. The majority reported being monogamous.

In Sierra Leone, the reported age difference was smaller, with girls interviewed averaging 17.8 years of age, and their partners 21.5 years of age. (However, when calculating the average age of the partner based on the girls' reporting, this jumped to 23.6. Hence, either girls do not know the age of their partners, or the partners may have not told the truth given the concerns about child marriage). Seven of the 12 girls had children. The majority reported being monogamous.

Table 4: Average Age of Married Adolescent Girls and their Partners

	Burkina Faso	Sierra Leone
Married Adolescent Girls	17.4	17.8
Partners	33.6	21.5

As per Table 5, many participants had limited formal schooling. In Burkina Faso, most of the married adolescent girls had never frequented school (6) or only had some primary school (3); one had completed primary and two had some secondary school. The partners were more educated: 3 had never frequented school, 2 had some primary, 3 had completed primary school, 3 had some secondary, and 1 had completed secondary school.

In Sierra Leone, the girls interviewed reported more formal education than in Burkina Faso. Most of the married adolescent girls had attended some secondary grades (6), with none having never frequented school, three with some primary school; two had completed primary and one had completed grade 12. The partners had a similar pattern to the girls (and more education than the partners in Burkina Faso): 1 had never frequented school, 1 had some primary, 1 had completed primary school, 8 had some secondary, and 1 had completed secondary school.

Table 5: Education Level of Married Adolescent Girls and their Partners

	Burkina Faso	Sierra Leone
Married Adolescent Girls		
Never attended school	6	0
Some primary Grades (1-4)	3	3
Completed Primary Grades (5-8)	1	2
Attended some secondary grades (9-11)	2	6
Completed Grade 12	0	1
Completed higher education	0	0
Their Partners		
Never attended school	3	1
Some primary Grades (1-4)	2	1
Completed Primary Grades (5-8)	3	1
Attended some secondary grades (9-11)	3	8
Completed Grade 12	1	1
Completed higher education	0	0

5 Results: Burkina Faso

The following section outlines the findings from Burkina Faso.

5.1 Decision-making on marriage

Respondents across groups note that it is often the father, or a male in the father’s family (e.g. brother) that makes the decision about marriage for a daughter given his role as head of the household.

At home, it is the husband who makes the decision to give the girl in marriage. Because you, the wife and the children, all belong to the husband. (Mother of unmarried adolescent girl)

A few respondents state that it is sometimes the mother is also involved in this decision. However, some fathers argue that it is the mother of the daughter that makes decisions alongside the daughter when it comes to marriage.

It is generally the mothers in complicity with their children who decide on the marriage of the children. (Father of unmarried adolescent girl)

In terms of influence over this decision for marriage, some younger and older unmarried adolescent girls feel that they have a say in the decision of who they are to marry, while others feel they do

not have a choice but have to follow what their parents decide. The quotations below highlight the different beliefs from unmarried adolescent girls of different ages.

If they call me to inform me of their choice and if the choice does not suit me, I can tell them to let me choose and marry the one I love. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

They are my parents but I have no influence on their decision. They are too complicated often they don't even tell you. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

I can't say anything. If you refuse your father's proposal, he may curse you and the curse may follow you all your life. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 10-14)

I will make my own decision. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 10-14)

There is also this variation amongst adolescent boys – some believe they will have the right to make their own decision when it comes to choosing who and when to marry, while others believe their parents (typically their father) will make this decision for them.

Because he (father) is the one who said, if he offers me, I will accept. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 10-14)

It is myself who will think to say I will marry a woman. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 10-14)

My father will decide on my marriage. I will have no influence. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 15-18)

It's the decision, it's the boy who makes the decision to get married, it's myself who makes the decision to get married. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 15-18)

Some of the married adolescent girls state that it was their idea to get married, as they were in love with their partners, and many were no longer in school. Others note it is their father who made the decision, and they felt that they could not refuse his decision and had to obey him. This is also related to whether the girl is in school or not, which will be discussed further in this report.

Because my father asked me. I was at school and he asked me because I couldn't say no, so I said yes. (Married adolescent girl)

Well, if it was that I was in school, I would seek to study to a certain level before I got married. But I'm not in school and I'm not doing any labor. So if you are asked to marry, if you disobey because you are not old enough to get married, and then you stay at home and get older, it doesn't matter. You are the one who has hurt yourself. (Married adolescent girl)

5.2 Main influencers of CEFM and adolescent pregnancy

Many respondents across groups noted that people should not get married until they are at least 20, given the law. However, there are exceptions to this identified by many respondents as well.

Pregnancy: A girl getting pregnant is reported a major reason for CEFM across groups of respondents.

A girl's "behaviour" including not attending school: In addition, if a girl is not attending school, this is another major influencer for CEFM that is identified across groups. Many respondents across different groups note that it is the "behaviour" of the girl that determines if she will be married young. If the girl's behaviour is "good" and she is in school and doing well, she will be less likely to be married young. If she is not in school, stays out late at night, hangs out with boys, and/or gets pregnant, then respondents across all groups felt that she will have to be married.

We don't have any initiation rites, but it's the children's behavior that makes them get married quickly, often very young, the girls get pregnant so we have to marry them and also if you don't do well in school and you walk around a lot, under the age you get married. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

Children are also married at a very young age because there are girls who wander around a lot, and for fear that they will become pregnant, they are married. (Married adolescent girl)

But the marriage of a girl before 18, to my knowledge, most of it is the behavior of the girls. It's their behavior that brings this on. If not in our community, nobody forces their child to marry a man, nobody marries her early if she has a good behavior. Nobody is going to force her or marry her early. This will not happen. (Partner of adolescent girl)

They [the girls] are often frivolous and want to do the rounds of men, often this is what can lead to forced marriage. Otherwise, if they want to continue their studies, no one will want their daughter to marry early. (Father of unmarried adolescent girl)

Physical characteristics indicating a girl has reached maturity: Some respondents note that there are physical characteristics that indicate a girl is ready for marriage, regardless of her age. Once a girl shows signs of this physical maturity (typically defined as when she starts to menstruate, and has breasts), this is a signal in some communities that she should be married. In some cases, this is identified as forced marriage (as per the quote below) where the girl may be locked up if she disagrees to take part in the marriage.

There are cultural practices when the period arrives, girls are proposed to marriage. If one of them refuses to get married, she is locked up, and if she wants to relieve herself, she is accompanied. Often the girl may try to run away and she is caught and locked up until the day of the wedding. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

What there is is the common wedding that some do every year. When the new year comes, we gather all the girls who have grown breasts and marry them on the same day. The one who refuses is expelled. (Married adolescent girl)

Being able to care for her family: Being mature, and able to take care of the family, is viewed as important.

The ideal age of marriage for a girl is between 16 and 18. Because she matures between 16 and 18. She can do the work well, her mind matures at that time and she can take care of people, and her mother-in-law. (Girl/Woman leader)

Concern about getting pregnant outside of marriage: Getting married once these signs of maturation manifest is also related to the fact that the girl can now get pregnant, and hence many respondents feel that it is better she gets married than to get accidentally pregnant outside of marriage, and bringing shame to the family.

Everyone agrees that the girl's parents start thinking about marriage for their daughter who is not dating as soon as she turns 15. To avoid her bringing shame on her parents (by getting pregnant). (Female religious leader)

Following circumcision: Some respondents also identified that marriage often happens after a girl or boy child is circumcised, as they are deemed to be ready for marriage at this time.

In some communities, from the age of 17 or 18, the boy is initiated, that is to say, he goes through circumcision and when this stage is finished, the child is said to be ready for marriage. The boy must look for a wife. It is the same for the girl. Often she is circumcised, which means that it is time for her to enter into marriage. There are certain traditions that require that as soon as the girl has her first period, she must marry. (Girl/Woman leader)

Religion and tradition: Some respondents, particularly traditional and religious leaders (male and female), note that they support early marriage due to religion and tradition.

In our country, at 15 years old, we have to marry the girl... At 15 she managed to take a husband. (Male traditional leader)

It's because of religion. We all became Muslim here. The religious leaders tell us that if a girl reaches 15 years old, you have to give her in marriage. Leaving a 15 year old girl with you, without giving her in marriage until she reaches 17 years old, actually in the Muslim religion they say that it is not good. (Female religious leader)

Muslims give girls in marriage for fear that they will get pregnant, yet they are not old enough to get married. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 10-14)

Poverty: Poverty is also a major contributor to child marriage that many respondents of different ages identify. Due to lack of food for all of the family members and/or lack of money for school fees for the daughter, a decision may be made to have the girl get married to reduce costs.

If you don't have the means to help her, when she is old enough to get married, her father wants her to get married, but she wants to continue her studies, you,

the mother, are obliged to respect the father's decision. Everything is linked to this poverty. (Mother of unmarried adolescent girl)

There are also economic reasons, there are parents who either have many children or who can no longer provide for all their children. So they prefer to give the girl in marriage. (Girl/woman leader)

One mother gives an example of a rich man providing a loan to the family since there is no food to feed the family, and then when that family cannot pay back the loan, the daughter has to marry the man.

For example, I'm here, I have nothing to feed my family. I've done everything, nothing. Here is this rich man, I approach him to ask for a loan. He gladly gives me the loan, but he had his own little idea in the back of his mind. Afterwards, I couldn't honor my commitment to him. That's when he offered to give me my daughter in exchange for what I owed him. My daughter is attending school and she likes to study. But because of this debt, I have no choice but to let her go with him. (Mother of unmarried adolescent girl)

Various cultural practices: A number of additional cultural practices were mentioned as contributing to CEFM, including traditions involving agreements and promises within the family (including “cossèguè”), or between families, to marry (even before the girl child is born). These practices were mentioned across groups of respondents as contributing to CEFM.

*If a child is not old enough to get married, he should not be married. But if there is a man who is interested he can give the cola (the dowry) we will deposit while waiting that the child grows up before marrying him.
(Unmarried adolescent girl, 10-14)*

Indeed, this man is the direct little brother of my maternal grandmother, so I also wanted to marry him. (Married adolescent girl)

Among the Mossi (an ethnic group in Burkina Faso) some parents exchange children and they will agree and decide to marry you without your knowledge. Whether you like it or not, you will leave. (Married adolescent girl)

For example, cultural practices, they have periods when they have weddings. In Dioula, there is what they call the "kossiguè", it is a practice.... These are promises. The guys say that in our family, if a girl is born, she will be given in marriage to such a family. This is a promise of the parents even before the girl is born. And the other family also waits until a girl is born to hope to receive her as a wife. These are cultural practices. So if she belongs to one family before she is born, (laughs) when she grows up at the age of 13 or 14, she has to go to the other family because it is a promise from her parents. (Male local government leader)

Perpetuation of the tradition: here there is a term that they call the "cossèguè" which is literally translated in Dioula as "the return". According to them, when a woman marries, the first daughter of the woman must marry into her uncles' family and this is an obligation. In this locality, the "cossèguè" is very very recurrent. (Female local government leader)

As soon as a girl is born, someone ties a rope on the baby's foot to say that she will be his wife. As soon as the girl (baby) grows up, the man who tied the rope on the baby's foot starts to go and cultivate the land of the girl's parents and when the girl reaches 17 or 18 years old, the future husband, who is often old, asks for his wife. Often the girl refuses and this is the problem and people complain that she has to be married by force, so she is beaten and taken to her husband. But now with the interpellation of the gendarmerie, if the child does not want, they do not force her to marry anymore. (Girl/woman leader)

A few people argue that these type of arrangements between families are no longer happening, or if they are happening, than the girl now has the right to say no to this marriage. However, as noted above, many children feel they cannot go against their parent's wishes when it comes to decisions like marriage.

These practices existed before our birth, they consisted in the marriage "cousin and cousin" to safeguard the family, this type of marriage is called "balimayafourou" or marriage between relatives. (Partner of adolescent girl)

It exists (marrying first daughter to mother's family), but in a way that the old men used to hold with rigor, now the old men say it. But if afterwards the girl refuses, we drop it. The old people don't hold it strictly anymore. They say so,

but there is no obligation. We also explain this to the girl. (Father of unmarried adolescent girl)

Use of plants, medicines, and potions: Using plants/medicines to convince someone to marry you was also mentioned as a cultural practice in some cases.

it is also, if they want to marry you and then you refuse, there are people who can take away to put in the food so that you leave [when the girl refuses to get married, they use the plant that they put in her food. Once the girl eats this plant she agrees to get married]. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

Here the boys go to make medicine to entice the girls and take them in marriage. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 15-18)

The use of these potions is sometimes identified as connected with kidnapping or abductions for forced marriage. Kidnapping was cited as still happening but one person mentioned it was happening less so than before.

In fact, before, when a young man fell in love with a girl, even if the girl didn't like him, he would wait for the girl to go out to do an errand and he would take advantage of this to kidnap her and take her to his house. The kidnapping could be done by day or night. When he arrived at his house with the girl, he put a potion in the food, so that she would eat it. As soon as she ate the food, she changed her mind and her reluctance to stay with the young man disappeared and was replaced by love. Thus, she became his wife at the same time, by force of circumstance... Yes, he could kidnap you and your family would take you home. But sometimes your parents would leave to take you home from him. If it happened that he had already given you the potion, even if your family took you home, you yourself would go back to his house because of the potion he made you drink. (Married adolescent girl)

There are abductions. If someone talks to you about his love and you don't consider these feelings towards you, he starts to look out for you. If one day he sees you at night, he and his friends will come and kidnap you and take you to his house. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

5.3 Decision-making on having children

For some married adolescent girls, they report that it is their husbands who make the decisions on having children, including when to have sex, when to use contraception, and how many children to have. This proves challenging for women to make decisions on contraception as it is their husband's decision.

When it comes to contraception, it's the man who makes the decision. When it comes to contraception, it's my husband who decides. I had even adopted a contraceptive method, but as soon as my husband found out, he got angry with me, so I had to stop it. (Married adolescent girl)

The man allows his wife to use contraceptives. (Partner of adolescent girl)

In other cases, some women state that they have some decision-making power in determining when to have sex, and also in deciding together with the husband about the use of contraception.

It is the woman, together with her husband, who decides on contraception. The woman can decide on the sexual intercourse. (Married adolescent girl)

For the use of contraceptives, the woman goes to the health services and returns with information. (Partner of adolescent girl)

5.4 Resources at the household level (access to and control)

Generally, the married adolescent girls and their partners outline that men make the decisions on income generation and expenses, as they are the head of the household and the ones who typically generate the income. The husband is responsible for buying food and clothing for the household, and paying for medical expenses.

It is the man who makes the decision about the expenses. (Married adolescent girl)

When it comes to money, I'm the one who makes the decision....Purchase of condiment, clothing, that's who [the husband] takes care of that. (Partner of adolescent girl)

5.5 Roles and responsibilities of females and males

The married adolescent girls and their partners note that it is the woman's role to take care of the children, and to wash and dress them. The role of women is also to wash dishes, clean the house, sweep, and prepare food. The woman gets the water and the firewood. Men are generally not involved in household activities, although a few note that they help when the woman is sick or if she is pregnant.

Men do not work like women. They don't do housework. (Married adolescent girl)

The man must help the woman in the housework, when she is pregnant or sick. (Partner of adolescent girl)

The role of the man is to earn an income and therefore ensure his wife and children are taken care of, with food and clothing, as well as medical care.

A few of the married adolescent girls raised the concern that if a woman does not do what she is supposed to do as a wife (e.g. be clean, be respectful, have children, cook well), then the husband will get another wife.

If you are not an ideal woman, your whole family knows it. The same is true of those outside. When you go out, people will say that so-and-so's wife is not a good wife, that he should look for another wife. This can influence your husband and it can make him take another wife. (Married adolescent girl)

5.6 Knowledge, attitudes and practices on CEFM

5.6.1 Unmarried adolescent girls

Unmarried adolescent girls (aged 10-14 and 15-18) generally identify CEFM as having many challenges and few advantages. Challenges identified include living a life in poverty, being beaten by your husband, having to do difficult housework, not being able to play with your friends, having to drop out of school, having childbirth complications, your husband taking another wife, and limited job prospects.

If I get married before 18. You can't have access to a lot of things. And then you're going to quit school. You won't be able to get a good job. You will suffer and then if you give birth to a lot of children, you will get tired looking for

their food. And the husband will go out and take another wife, he will say that you are small. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 10-14)

A few older adolescent girls also mention that unhappiness in marrying before the age of 18 may even lead to suicide.

If I get married before I'm 18, it's not normal and besides, I won't be happy. Also my life will have no meaning. It can lead to suicide, because you don't see the importance of your life anymore. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

Some of these challenges of CEFM are illustrated through the photos these adolescent girls took. A few examples of photos, and their descriptions from the girls, are below.



P: The tree was cut down, preventing it from having many leaves. If we had left the tree, it would have many leaves and people would have been able to benefit from its shade. The tree is destroyed. The tree could not have many leaves, nor fruit.

I: What does this mean in relation to child marriage?

P: It means that if you get married before 18, your life will be destroyed like this tree. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)



P: It is a cut tree. It is no longer useful. The picture shows that we should not let the girl marry before 18 years old or the bride without their consent. Otherwise her life will not be useful. It is like forcing a growing tree to cut it down or stop its growth. You will not be happy. I took this picture because if you get married before 18, your husband may look at you as useless, as if you were not a person, or as if you were just an object. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

On the other hand, these girls feel that if you stay in school and avoid getting married before 18 years of age, you could start your own business, and have a successful family life. These photos below illustrate the advantages of waiting to be married.



This woman got married when she was over 18, she was smart enough to go into business and it's working out well. Everything she does is successful. She knows how to take care of her children and her house.... I also want to get married at an older age like this woman so that I can be successful in whatever business I undertake. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 10-14)

These girls also identify assets and goods, like cars, houses, gas stoves and even eggplants, that they could purchase if they stay in school and are able to get a good job, and not get married or pregnant before they are 18. They also state that they can then help their parents by purchasing these items for their parents as well.



This is a nice house that I photographed. I saw the house and I liked it, that's why I took the picture. If they let me finish my studies and then I work, this is the house that I will build. For me this picture means that if I am not 18 years old and I am given in marriage I will not be able to have the money to build this beautiful house but if I am more than 18 years old before I get married I will work and have the money to come and build this house in joy for my parents because I have the big sister of a friend who made this house for her parents and it has more. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)



This image should say that we should not marry very young children. If I get married before I'm 18, I won't be able to have this to cook with, it's the wood I'll be using to cook with and the smoke will bother me a lot, I'll smell bad. But when you get married at an older age, you can buy a gas fireplace and even pay for your parents. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)



This picture tells us that I want to be 18 years old and older before I get married so that I can go to the market and pay for my eggplants because I don't want to work in the fields. I want to work in an office and so does my husband and we would have money permanently to buy as many eggplants as we want. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

5.6.2 Unmarried adolescent boys

Most unmarried adolescent boys wanted to finish school before they got married, and find a job that they could support their wife and children.

Unmarried adolescent boys were read a vignette about a 16-year old girl, who is writing a letter to get advice from Mousso Gnouma, as her parents have decided that she has to be married. The boys were then asked a series of questions about this letter. Based on this vignette, some of the boys noted that CEFM results in much suffering for the girl, including childbirth complications.

The girl there is a kid, she is not 18 years old. She will not be able to stay there, she will suffer. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 10-14)

Marrying a girl before she is 18 can cause her to die in childbirth. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 15-18)

Some of the boys felt that the 16-year old girl had options like talking to her parents, going to the police, or running away. However, not all the boys agreed that this was a forced marriage, and a few thought she had to accept the marriage since her parents told her she had to get married.

For me is not a forced marriage. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 10-14)

She must accept: she can accept because it is her father who gives her in marriage. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 10-14)

She can ask to be left alone. But if the parents refuse she will have to accept to get married. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 15-18)

5.6.3 Married adolescent girls

Some married adolescent girls cite having children as a positive outcome of being married young. One said “there is nothing positive”. Some also note that there is nothing negative about being married young. However, others mentioned lack of mobility, their in-laws, the other wife, or the hard work involved.

Since I'm married I can't go out for a walk. I'm not free like I was when I was not yet married. (Married adolescent girl)

Many of the married adolescent girls would not want their daughter to be married before 18 because she is not mature and the house work is hard. However, a few would have no issue with marrying their daughter before 18 if she wanted to be married or to avoid her getting pregnant before marriage.

5.6.4 Partners of married adolescent girls

Partners of married adolescent girls also mention children as a positive in their marriage, as well as the wives doing the household chores. Financial difficulties, quarrels, and loss of freedom of being single were mentioned by a few men as challenges in marriage.

Most partners of married adolescent girls also would not want their daughters married before age 18, since they would suffer because of hard work or complications from delivering a baby, and they want their daughters to stay in school.

(No), because she will suffer, she will have to do hard work for her age. (Partner of married adolescent girl)

On the other hand, some of these men noted that they would allow their daughter to be married before 18 if it was her decision, or to avoid her getting pregnant before she is married.

It depends on the girl's behavior. If she even goes out with boys, it means she can get married. (Partner of married adolescent girl)

5.6.5 Other groups

There were respondents across other groups, including parents and religious leaders, who felt that child marriage was justified even as young as 15 years of age, particularly if the girl was not in school, she was not listening to her parents, and thus to avoid pregnancy outside of marriage.

We think they should get married at 15 even, because you know, they don't stay still. If you don't give them away early, if they get pregnant, it can become a problem. That's why we give them in marriage at 15. (Mother of unmarried adolescent girl)

It's the same thing there. Everything is in the hands of the child and the father. If the child accepts to listen to your advice, at 20 years old, she must know how to keep a house, taking example from her mother. But if between the ages of 16 and 17, she knows nothing of this, she is undisciplined, and her father wants her to get married, how will you do it? You will be forced to accept that she be given in marriage. If she doesn't listen to her mother's or her father's advice, she'll get what she wants. Otherwise it is not our wish that our daughters get married between 17 and 18 years old, but everything comes from the father and the child himself. That's all I had to say. (Mother of unmarried adolescent girl)

As noted in the above sections, religion is also a reason provided by some for CEFM. A few support child marriage as they feel these girls are ready for marriage if they have the right build and are able to do housework.

When she is 15 years old we give her in marriage. But still they say 15 or 17 as the age of marriage for girls, it all depends on the child's build. There are children at 15 years old, they are already in good shape and they know how to do the housework. So they can be given in marriage... (Female religious leader)

A few parents of unmarried girls identify that if a child gets married before 18, and there is suffering (including early pregnancy, lack of food), then the parents of the girl will suffer as well.

When a child marries under the age of 18, there is nothing but suffering. The reality that I experienced is that this marriage did not succeed and the child came home. But before leaving this marriage, she made a child and until today, the child is with me. There is nothing good in it, it is all suffering. And all the suffering is on me. (Mother of unmarried adolescent girl)

5.7 Access to SRHR information and services

Some older unmarried adolescent girls stated that they had no barriers to accessing SRHR, and that no one is stopping them from accessing these services. Other unmarried adolescent girls say they are not accessing these services because they are not old enough yet. However, as one respondent noted, some have questions on these services.

When it comes to pregnancy, how do you avoid getting pregnant? (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

Some respondents across different groups worry about the side effects of taking birth control as they hear from others that the use of contraception can be problematic in terms of causing sickness, increasing the ability to have children later, or leading to complications in child birth later.

There are some who accept that their children do it to avoid getting pregnant, but others tell their children not to use contraception because it causes illness. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

There are no barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services. It is often the fear of suffering the consequences of contraception that makes people not do it. Indeed, contraception can make you sick, it can disappear in your body, it can destroy your eggs, or cause a menstrual dysfunction. (Married adolescent girl)

Because they say that when the woman does these things, the next deliveries become very complicated, the women get very sick and suffer a lot during the next pregnancies. And it can lead to an operation at delivery. (Married adolescent girl)

*No obstacles, only the women who went there to take the contraceptives get sick all the time and worse, they have difficulties to get pregnant afterwards.
(Partner of adolescent girl)*

In some cases, parents will not allow unmarried girls to access these services as they feel the girls should not be having sex. It is difficult to pay on their own as costs are high, and people may feel ashamed to access these services.

Often you are ashamed to go alone to the health services because you are not old enough to go to the health services and often you don't have the money to go so you go with your friends. If your parents know that you are going, they will scold you. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

Some of the mothers of adolescent girls said they will support their daughters in accessing contraception, if this means she will stay in school and not get pregnant. However, some of these mothers were also concerned that using contraception would lead to their daughters being promiscuous.

Yes, we will support her because we want her to do well in school and we don't want her to get pregnant. But there are kids who become promiscuous because of that and they will say that the parents even support them in that. (Mother of unmarried adolescent girl)

Married adolescent girls, and mothers of unmarried adolescent girls, note that their husbands are a major barrier for married women who may want to use contraceptives, as the husbands often want more children and they are concerned that women on contraceptives will have sex with men other than their husbands. However, they also note that it is the woman, not the man, who suffers if she has more children than planned.

*If I tell my husband, he refuses. I had even opted for a contraceptive method, without him knowing. Then I switched to injectable birth control and that's when he knew, otherwise he didn't know. He got angry and I stopped it.
(Married adolescent girl)*

Sometimes the man accepts and he gives the money and you go to do the contraception, which can be the compressions or the injections. But many

times he refuses and so we hide and go to do the contraception and then when the man is looking for a child in vain he makes the fight and people support him. (Married adolescent girl)

Being married, if she goes to the health center, it is because she has her husband's agreement. She can't decide to go by herself. (Mother of unmarried adolescent girl)

There are men who don't want their wives to do it, because if they do it, it leads them to commit adultery outside. (Mother of unmarried adolescent girl)

Fathers of unmarried adolescent girls generally do not support the use of contraception because of side effects or that it will lead to promiscuity. One father however noted that the girl could discuss this with the mother.

I am against it because it leads to sexual debauchery. (Father of unmarried adolescent girl)

I am against these methods because it creates other problems for women. (Father of unmarried adolescent girl)

Health care workers do not always treat these services confidentially, and may tell other community members about the services that an adolescent is accessing.

It's not easy. Often you go for information on sexual and reproductive health, including contraception, and afterwards, it is the health workers who will tell your friends and family about your frequent visits to the clinic, so what you do in secret, if they find out, will not do you any good. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

Most adolescent boys say they have no challenges to accessing SRHR services, or do not access these services. It is noted that boys can also purchase condoms in stores.

However, one boy said the challenge was getting medicines for certain illnesses (presumably sexually transmitted infections (STIs) although this was not probed in the interviews). As with adolescent girls, shame in accessing services was noted as a concern.

When he has illnesses, he doesn't want to talk about. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 15-18)

5.8 National policies, strategies and institutional capacities – CEFM

There is a mixed understanding of the laws on CEFM. Some people claim that they are not aware of a law banning CEFM in Burkina Faso, or there is a lack of awareness about the law.

Often even there are communities that think that it is normal! They don't know that it is forbidden. (Male local government leader)

*Is the government enforcing the law on the minimum legal age for marriage?
It never knows to pass here. (Male traditional leader)*

Communities also partake in traditional marriage (versus marrying at the town hall where marriages are registered with the government). This makes it challenging for the government to enforce the laws on CEFM.

Unfortunately, there are marriages that are performed on a cultural, customary, traditional or religious level, and the government does not necessarily have a say in these marriages. A marriage that is done on a customary level in a locality, life has already begun in this couple. It is not certain that the government knows that there has been a marriage. But they consider that it is their marriage! So, everything that is done in legal marriage, is what they also do in customary marriage. Still, there is a couple that is put together that must live as if they were legally married. All the benefits and consequences of that couple are the same as a legally married couple. The government cannot keep up with all these marriages. (Male local government leader)

When you have to go to the town hall for example to get married, the government checks if the girl has really reached the age of 18. But it is not at all levels, because not all marriages are celebrated at the town hall. There are customary marriages and religious marriages that the government does not control. (Girl/woman leader)

Organizations working on advocating against CEFM that were identified by leaders include the Ministry of Women, National Solidarity and Humanitarian Action, Save the Children, National Strategy for the Elimination of Child Marriage, and the Cooperation for the Rights of the Child (CDE), the police, and teachers.

In terms of who they might report to if they heard about a child marriage, different respondents varied in terms of what they would do. Responses varied from doing nothing and accepting the marriage, talking to the parents, talking to the girl, reporting to the police, or telling her to run away.

If his parents agree to do the wedding, you another person cannot go and say that it can't be done! you can't do that. You will not be able to. (Male traditional leader)

Well, I will tell the person to accept to get married. And if there is a problem, it will be the parents' fault. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

You talk to the girl's parents about not giving her away in marriage, because she is not old enough. If they refuse, you leave them. They are the ones who will collect the broken skins. Because if there are problems, they will be responsible. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 10-14)

She (child being forced to be married) must summon them to the police station; she can also summon them to the village chief. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 15-18)

Whether this is reported or not can depend on factors such as the girl child being in school and being “behaved”.

Especially the children who are still studying and who are given in marriage by force, we can go to the authorities to inform them about this. (Mother of unmarried adolescent girl)

Still others did not view CEFM as an issue, as they support child marriage, and hence would not report this to anyone.

Actually, I'm going to make blessings for her to join this home. (Partner of adolescent girl)

The leaders interviewed noted that girls do not necessarily have to drop out of school when they are pregnant, although some do. The father of the child may also pay for the schooling for the girl. After giving birth, the girl would need someone to watch the baby to attend school. There are some supports, such as income generation activities and literacy training, for girls who are young mothers (e.g. Fonds d'appui aux activités rémunératrices des femmes – FAARF; Association des jeunes filles battantes; Alphabétisation et Formation Intensive pour le Développement des Enfants; Maia Association).

6 Findings: Sierra Leone

The following section outlines the findings from Sierra Leone.

6.1 Decision-making on marriage

Generally, respondents noted that it is the father that makes the decisions about marriage for the daughter. Sometimes, the mother is also involved. However, children do not want to go against their parents' wishes in general.

Well, I don't know but I will have to obey my parent because they know what is best for me. (Unmarried girl, 10-14)

On the other hand, some unmarried girls felt that they had power in the decision to decide who to marry, and that they will wait until their schooling is done and they are older to get married.

Most time our parents decide for us... Myself, I will decide to get married, not my parent...Because I had reached the maturity age to (be) married and if you have reached the actual age to (be) married you can do so. (Unmarried girl, 15-18)

My father, but he will not force me if I do not want to. (Unmarried girl, 15-18)

When I finish my education, nobody would tell me to get marriage, I would decide for myself. (Unmarried girl, 10-14)

Some older unmarried boys felt that they could make the decision of who to marry, with their parents input, while others felt the parents had the last word on the matter.

Well me, I feel that when I get to that age just like I said 20 years and above, if I reach that stage I can decide for myself because I have reached the stage to pass decision. (Unmarried boy, 15-18)

Yes, I have to choose the woman I want and let them know for their consent. If they do not accept, I will not force. (Unmarried boy, 15-18)

My parents, they have the last saying... I don't have power to say no, because they gave birth to me, I will not be able to decide anything they say unless I agreed, they have the final say. (Unmarried boy, 15-18)

Very young adolescent boys felt that they did not have a say and their father (or parents together) would make the decision for them.

He (father) will sit together with my mother and they will decide whatever they say is final. (Unmarried boy, 10-14)

Boys also want to wait until they are done their schooling before marriage, and until they have a job and are able to support their wife and children.

I want to complete my education before I married.... Because if I say I'm to marry now, supporting the wife will be my challenge.... After we shall have giving birth, caring for the child as well as the woman is very challenging, it is for all these reasons I said I don't want to married soon. (Unmarried boy, 15-18)

6.1.1 Married adolescent girls

Pregnancy plays a major role in child, early and forced marriage in Sierra Leone. For the most part, the married adolescents noted that it was their father or parent's decision that they were married, because they were pregnant.

My parents, because when I got pregnant they drove me out of the house to go and stay with the man that impregnated me, there was no option, so I went and stayed with the man and up till now we are together. (Married adolescent girl)

These girls generally did not feel ready to be married, but since they were pregnant, they had no choice. Many wanted to continue with their schooling.

I was not ready to get married but I got pregnant, my father forced me to married to the man that make me pregnant. (Married adolescent girl)

I was not ready to get married at that time, I wanted to continue with my education but, I got pregnant so my mother asked the man to come and marry me. (Married adolescent girl)

In a few cases the girl said that she herself made the decision to marry. One factor in this decision was peer pressure to get married given other friends her age were getting married and having children.

Why I was really ready to get married was because all my friends were getting married and having children and they were provoking me that I was barren and unable to bear kids; so that prompted me to get married. (Married adolescent girl)

Poverty in the girl's family also played a role in the decision to get married.

While we were dating, living conditions turned out very difficult for my mother. We barely managed to survive so I decided to choose him as means to getting money so that I would in turned helped my mother. (Married adolescent girl)

At age 17 a man asked for my hand in marriage I felt like it is an escape route from all my suffering so I had no other option but to accept the proposal not because I had ever wanted that but because that was the only way to save myself and siblings. (Married adolescent girl)

6.2 Main influencers of CEFM and adolescent pregnancy

Respondents identify a number of key influencers of CEFM in Sierra Leone.

Poverty: Because of poverty among parents, girls may seek to be married as they do not have parents who can support them, including feeding them or paying for their education. This can also happen when a child has no parents who are alive, as they have no one to care for them.

Majority of the parents are poor and as such, they give their girls away in early marriages. (Married adolescent girl)

Children who lost their families gets married early because they do not have someone to take care of them. (Married adolescent girl)

Poverty, some girls will go to school without lunch so they will look for boyfriend who will be helping them with lunch and other support so they are forced to marry. (Girl/woman leader)

If you are going to school and you don't have some(one) to pay your school charges, this will lead to teenage pregnancy and eventually early marriage. (Girl/woman leader)

Obedience: In addition to poverty, obedience of the child to the parent can play a role as well, if the parent has decided that the child is to marry.

Poverty, hardship and parental obedient mostly moves our children to agree upon any decision on marriage for them. (Mother of adolescent girl)

Disco dances, social clubs and nightclubs: Respondents across groups mention that children go out at night to disco dances, social clubs and nightclubs, then girls meet men, and return home late. They can be involved in sexual activity, resulting in pregnancy.

Disco dance greatly contribute to child marriage in this community because most of the normally go to disco dance at night and will not listen to their parents advice and normally return home late in the morning. Some time they get pregnant due to the night shows and will forced them to early child marriage. (Married adolescent girl)

There are a lot of social clubs in the community and that is where most of the girls became pregnant, they will attend those events and they will use those platforms to go look for men and have sex. (Girl/woman leader)

Avoiding pregnancy: Parents want to avoid having their children get pregnant, so once a girl has reached puberty, she is married so she does not get pregnant out of wedlock. Hence, girls may be married as soon as they start to menstruate and have breasts.

I am a Muslim so I can tell you this most of our Muslim parents will tell you that once a girl has started her menstrual period and have breast she is ready for marriage and they will also tell you that as a parent if your child has reached that stage and you do not give her away for marriage if she go and commit fornication, it is a sin to the parents more especially to the father. So, to avoid that, most of them give their girls out for marriage. (Married adolescent girl)

Respondents note that this can be related to cultural practices and beliefs, including being rooted in religion as noted by the quotations below.

In Islam as we know and learning, what we call woman in our mende tradition, there is one thing we call menstruation.. that is the condition that tells us that a woman is matured to marry (but) if she is in school, we will wait until the age stated by government is due. (Male religious leader)

Parents are the most contributing factors to child marriage more especially the deep Muslim religious parents, (the Kormehdeh people) born-again muslims, when the child gets big breast and start to menstruate they may become mature in the eyes of their parents and send the child to married to the choice of husband from the parents....Because they see as a way to protect their girl child virginity and protecting the reputation of the family. (Girl/woman leader)

Not attending school: If girls are not attending school, or are not paying attention in school or doing well in school, this is another reason for the parents to have the girl marry young. They parents feel that this will ensure she does not get pregnant and bring shame to the family.

The other thing is that some of our children will be going to school but will refuse to pay attention in their studies, I have a daughter like that, I give her for marriage since she was not ready to go to school and now she has her own children. (Mother of adolescent girl)

Pregnancy: Pregnancy is a major influencer for CEFM. Once pregnant, the shame brought to the family results in the child (girl child) being married.

Secret societies: Respondents across the groups mentioned that initiations in Bondo secret society (girls) and Poro (boys) are done once the children have reached puberty. Following these rites, the child is then ready to be married. (However, some mentioned that these societies do not exist anymore and others were reluctant to discuss them).

The Bondo secret society - for instance, I was 15 years when I was initiated. No sooner had I come out of the society bush than I was given off to marriage by my father. Here the Bondo is one main practice that causes girls to go into early marriage. My father being a staunch Muslim told me that I should get married before I get impregnated out of wedlock and so he decided to give me off to married at an early age. (Married adolescent girl)

Yes, this is what has giving increased in child early married. One, just after initiation, boys feel oblige to married, so also for the girls. This has not being the usual way but now boys and girls are sent to the society bush at very tender age and sooner coming out they know everything about sex. (Partner of married adolescent girl)

They say we have also matured, we have learned much about responsibility, we are big men, we have learned things that we feel we can rely on in order to get married to a woman. They will say our child has learned how to brush, how to prepare swamp and how to climb palm tree. They say if we have learned all these qualities it will be time for us to get married, they even say sometimes in this community that when a boy climbs a tree he it means he is a big man because he able to sell product from the palm tree to support his family, he is able to harvest palm fruit, sell the palm oil and support his wife and child and in this community people are able to climb palm tree at a very young age and the moment you are able to climb the palm tree they started saying that you have mature. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 15-18)

However, other respondents insisted that these societies do not contribute to CEFM.

Actually, social or cultural, or ceremony is not a contributing factor to boys or girls early or force marriage. Yeah, they exist, but they are not contributing to

child or force marriage in Cole town community. (Partner of married adolescent girl)

Specific cultures: Some specific groups were mentioned by respondents to have customs that supported child marriage, including certain ethnic groups (referred to as tribes in the quotes below) who would gift their children, men who would give gifts from the birth of a baby girl with the intention to marry her when she was older, the custom of marrying the husband of the late elder sister, the use of charms, or chiefs raising a girl and then marrying her.

Like the Komende Tribe in this community, they will give their daughters away in marriage even if the man does not approach the girl. They give them off as free gifts based on their own religious beliefs and even sometimes give the man some token to have accepted to take their daughter as his wife. They don't believe in education for their girls so they give them away in early marriages as soon as they begin having breast. (Mother of adolescent girl)

When a woman give birth to a baby girl parent encourage a man will start given a gift to the parents and start telling them this girl is my wife. So, before the child reaches maturity age the man will start having sex with her with the knowledge of the parents. Later the parents will ask the man to come married the girl. (Unmarried girl, 15-18)

Because of money, some parent even performs ceremonies e.g. going to herbalist to give them charm so that rich men can see their children, if the man comes for the girl and she is still going to school, that parent will tell the girl to stop going to school and get married. (Girl/woman leader)

Yes, when the elder sister dies the parents will replace the smaller girl child to married the husband of the late elder sister to take care of the children of the decease. (Girl/woman leader)

Like the chief they will say this girl I will raise her up even though they know that they are capable of being a father to that child they still marry her because they are chiefs which was bad. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 15-18)

Television, movies and social media: Television, social media, cell phones, and pornography were identified in a few cases across groups as having a negative influence on child marriage. Girls may see people on television with money, and look to men to get money and gifts, which may result with them getting pregnant.

If a man gives you money don't take it, I hope you are seeing all those women in the television that are speaking English and I know you want to be like them, if you patient and complete your education you will be like them, you can wear all the high heels and cloths you want if you are educated, so please don't be distracted' so far it has been good. (Mother of adolescent girl)

6.3 Decision-making on having children

Adolescent married women noted that typically, it is the man who decides when to have sex, when to use family planning, and whether to have more children.

If I want to join family planning he will be the one to tell me before going for it. (Married adolescent girl)

However, some married adolescent girls noted that the woman may also decide on when to have sex and the number of children to have.

Many of the partners of adolescent girls also agreed that it is the man who makes these decisions on sex, the number of children to have, and contraception use.

Women have no decision, we decide everything. (Partner of married adolescent girl)

However, others stated that the man and woman decide together on contraception.

6.4 Resources at the household level (access to and control)

Adolescent married girls cited that decisions on spending money are often made by the man, although women may be involved in these decisions. There are mixed opinions from adolescent married girls on whether income generating activities are done solely by the husband, or by both the husband and wife.

Decisions to go to the health facility might be taken by the man (since he often controls the spending), but in other cases, others say it is the woman who can decide to go to the health facility.

The two of us finds money together, but at the end, the man guides or gives

suggestions on how to utilize it. (Married adolescent girl)

If I want to go to the hospital he tells me when to go because he has to give me money. (Married adolescent girl)

The partners of adolescent girls tend to agree, although a few noted that having input from the female on decisions around resources can help to keep the “peace”.

If you are in peace you both will discuss and agree, but it is the husband that will take the lead. (Partner of married adolescent girl)

6.5 Roles and responsibilities of women, girls, boys and men

Married adolescent girls report that doing household chores is mainly a woman’s role, including cooking meals, cleaning and sweeping, washing dishes, washing clothes, getting water, and taking care of children (bathing, changing the baby, and feeding). In many cases, men may assist with some chores, such as feeding children or getting water.

Fetching firewood may be done by men or women, but is often cited as being done by the men in Sierra Leone given what men say are the physical difficulties of this task.

The role of the man is to financially support the household, including the wife and children. He provides shelter, food, and clothes.

The roles outlined by the partners of married adolescent girls are similar. They state that the woman’s domain is in the household, and it is for doing these tasks that men have wives.

[When referring to cooking]: you are having a wife for that, we are taking women for that. (Partner of married adolescent girl)

It’s the role of the woman to wash the pans and spoons unless she is sick, that was why I married her. (Partner of married adolescent girl)

An ideal wife is seen by both married adolescents and their partners as a woman who takes care of her children, her home and her husband as well as her husband’s family. She is clean and respects her husband and his family.

An ideal husband takes good care of his family, is loving and caring, hardworking, does not beat the wife, helps his wife in the home, and is educated.

6.6 Knowledge, attitudes and practices on CEFM

6.6.1 Unmarried adolescent girls

The majority of the photos taken by young adolescent girls were of young girls who were pregnant or young mothers (or young boys who had left school or were young fathers). Because of the concern that displaying these in the report is stigmatizing (and also the girls and boys are underage, despite getting consent for the photos), examples of these photos are not included here.

The comments that the young adolescent girls (10-14 in focus groups and 15-18 in interviews) made in relation to these photos focused on how difficult it was when you get pregnant young and/or have to be married young, as you will suffer in terms of lack of food, lack of medicine, lack of support from your husband, the husband taking another wife, not being able to move freely, and will have to leave school. In addition, childbirth will bring complications.

I took this picture to come and tell you that this child is suffering and her husband is treating her badly. He doesn't provide food or medicine for the girl. She finds it difficult to get food to eat. If you didn't reach the age to get married, you will not feel happy in the home. Also, your husband will not have respect for you. But if you are older when you get married you have much knowledge to decide on what is good for you not to strain. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

Because if you are married very young you couldn't able to move freely in the married home but if you reach the maturity age before you get married you will be very happy and have free movement of interaction with others. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

I want people to grow older and get married because most of those that get married at an early age and get pregnant when giving birth some of them die during child birth and those that survive are not healthy and their babies are malnourished because there is no better support for both the mothers and children. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 10-14)

Some of the girls also note the shame surrounding getting pregnant early, and therefore having to marry early.

Well, if you are pregnant at an early age, when your friends are moving around freely you will be sitting down with your pregnancy ashamed and also when you have the baby, you will be holding your baby and suffering to take care of the baby. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 10-14)

On the other hand, these girls noted that if you are married later, than you are better able to care for your children, and also pay school fees to end the cycle of CEFM. Many note that they will have jobs if they marry later.

When someone grows big and get marriage for that person, she will be able to take care for her children and also pay their school fees so that they will not marriage early. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 10-14)

Because if for instance that person has completed her education get married them give birth she will be receiving her monthly salary and things will not be too difficult for her because she used that money for her up keep. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 10-14)

Some of these girls also identify that if they stay in school, and do not get married young, they will be able to help their family and their community.

P4: because I want to be as educated as you and I want to be a big woman in society, so if I get married now I will not be able to go to school. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 10-14)

P5: I want to help my family and my community, so I want to finished my education if I get married now I won't be able to do all these things. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 10-14)

6.6.2 Married adolescent girls

There is varying opinion about what is positive from child marriage amongst adolescents who are already married. Some say there is nothing positive and they are suffering, while others state that they are not suffering and that their husbands are taking good care of them.

My husband and family (in-laws) are taking good care of me. I am not suffering. I am not suffering. (Married adolescent girl)

However, many negative aspects are identified, including having to do (difficult) farm work, dropping out of school, her husband not providing basic necessities, being physically beaten by her husband, being cheated on, and having trouble accessing medical services for herself or her child.

Like beating and cheating on me. These are the bad or negative things right now. (Married adolescent girl)

I am not enjoying in this marriage, I regret being married at this early age. (Married adolescent girl)

When asked, none of these girls want their daughter to be married under the age of 18, as they want them to stay in school, to be successful, and to not suffer as they have suffered by being married young.

I don't want my daughter to get married before she is 18, yes because I want her to be educated and become somebody in society. (Married adolescent girl)

6.6.3 Partners of married adolescent girls

The partners of married adolescent girls also noted there were challenges in marriage, including providing for their partners in terms of food, medication, and health services.

Well the suffering which the woman was pregnant it was not easy for me to give her money to go to the hospital. It was bad so now I have got the understanding for you to be underage to get marriage it will not easy for you, really the suffering will be too much for you as underage. (Partner of married adolescent girl)

These partners, however, note that the positive side of marriage was having children.

The only positive aspect of our married is the child we have giving birth to. So I say thanks to God for that. (Partner of married adolescent girl)

Most partners of married adolescent girls did not want their daughters to get married before 18, as they wanted them to finish schooling. They also recognized the challenges and suffering of marrying young.

No, I want her to continue her schooling, I want her to get the best education because myself what I did at time I have regret it so I want her to get her education for me it was poverty that make me to get marriage at that age. My girl child I will support to fully for me to see that she is educated and she cannot marriage at early age. (Partner of married adolescent girl)

However, a few partners noted that they would like their girl child to be married young so that she can help support him (the father), or because of their culture and religion.

If she, before she gets to 18 years, why I said I want her to get married, by that time she will be able to do something for me. (Partner of married adolescent girl)

I'm a Muslim, we deal with the Islamic law, and based on Islamic law says if the child is matured which is called "muhallaq", which is the maturity stage, if the child sees someone who wants to married her she can married. If I have a child who is below 18yrs and someone says he wants to married her. I will allow it.... Presently a child matures around 16-17 years. (Partner of married adolescent girl)

One partner asked the interviewer to know more about the impact of child marriage. Hence, awareness of the impact of CEFM may not be clear to some.

They said a girl child who has not reach the age of 18 if she marries it is good or bad and if a boy child who has not reach 18 years of age if he marries is that bad? (Partner of married adolescent girl)

6.6.4 Other groups

Many of the fathers of unmarried adolescent girls do not want their daughters to be married before they are 18 years of age. A number mentioned the importance of educating the girl child.

Because now this country and around the world if the girl child is educated you have educated 2-3 boys. (Father of adolescent girl)

Some fathers note that if the girl is in school, they will support her to stay in school and not have her married. However, if she gets pregnant, then she will not be supported and will have to be married.

If she's going to school and she doesn't consider married I will support her 100%. If she is going to school and finding education I will support but if she's not going to school and she is within the age of married I will not support her. If she got pregnant I will not support her, because she will not be got pregnant from street and she should show me the man and she will transfer to the man and the man should be responsible. (Father of unmarried adolescent girl)

Other fathers said that the daughter will have to be married once she reaches the age of marriage as this is part of their religion.

When my daughter has reached the age of married and does not want to married I will not support her today nor tomorrow. (a) Because I'm a Muslim and when a girl child is matured and is over 20 years will have the urge to have sex and as such she needs to be with a man, it's the responsibility of the man to find work for her or even if I want to help her she must have a man and I never support her if she wants to married and decides not to, we will never have peace. (Father of unmarried adolescent girl)

Unmarried adolescent boys identified a number of challenges with CEFM through the vignette, where Bintu (a 16 year old girl) has written Aunty to ask for her help as her parents are making her get married.

The boys noted that violence and maltreatment from her husband, difficulties in childbirth, lack of food, and having to drop out of school were all issues that Bintu faces.

Bintu is afraid, if she married at that age she won't be able to take decision at her matrimonial home. If she gets pregnant to be able to give birth on her own would be a problem because she is too young. Also, maybe the man she would get married to is someone bigger than her, he would be beating and maltreating her. So, that's what she is afraid of not to get married at that age.
(Unmarried adolescent boy, 15-18)

However, a few boys feel she has to go along with the marriage, either to honour her parents or if she is not in school. In the quote below, the boy hopes the husband might continue to “allow” her to go to school. However, the alternative is that if Bintu does not follow her parents, she may end up abandoned and on the street.

Well for the honor of her parents as we are told by the Holy Quran that our parents are the one holding on the keys to heaven. She is to accept their decision to marriage. It doesn't me that when someone married that is the end of her education. If the husband values the education, he can allow her to continue her education while the two of them are together. If now she says she is not going to listen to her parents, what if now they asked her to leave their house? She will jump on the street and become commercial sex worker.
(Unmarried adolescent boy, 15-18)

6.7 Access to SRHR information and services

Some respondents mention there are no barriers for sexual and reproductive health information and services. These respondents note that Marie Stopes provides services through a vehicle that comes to communities.

Many unmarried adolescents said they were not accessing these services and were abstaining. Others (including married adolescent girls and mothers of adolescent girls) cite that barriers include the husband deciding on the use of contraception, and that he expects her to have children, so will not allow contraception.

We the married women face more barriers than girls because our husband will not sometime allow us to prevent or space our children. They want us to have children for then as much as they want. (Mother of unmarried adolescent girl)

In other cases, lack of money to purchase contraception is a challenge, as is lack of availability of products for unmarried people.

If those that are married miss the vehicle they easily buy from the pharmacy but if you are not married and have missed that vehicle you will find it very difficult to raise money (to) buy because there is no one that can provide it for you. (Father of unmarried adolescent girl)

Before marriage, parents are cited as a challenge to accessing contraception for girls, as they will not allow you to use contraceptives, as you will be seen as wanting to have sex or even as being a prostitute.

For us that are married, our husbands serve as our biggest barriers whilst those who are not married, have their parents and the community acting as barriers. (Married adolescent girl)

Also, if you are not married the community people we say you don't want to give birth because you want to engage in prostitute's life. (Married adolescent girl)

Yes. Lack of money, my parents and community people says I have a passbook for prostitution as a young girl. (Unmarried girl, 15-18).

However, the alternative is that some girls may seek alternate sources of contraception that are not reliable, such as withdrawal or getting contraception from the “quack doctor”.

Our parent will not allow us so in other to take it some of us will hide and pay the “PePe” doctors (Quack Doctor) to give us. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

Yes, for me my father will not allow me so even when the Vehicle come around I will be scared to go there because even if my dad did not see me as long as a relative see me my dad will know so I have never taken it instead I will not allow the man to finish (Withdrawal method) or he use condom. (Unmarried adolescent girl, 15-18)

Men and women across all groups cite concerns about the negative side effects of contraception that they have heard about.

Well, some of the told me that the contraceptives they take some of them cause bleeding for them and some complained that they started losing weight and some said they gained weight which makes them to stop using it. (Married adolescent girl)

Some people, including a few married adolescent girls and fathers of adolescent girls, feel that they should not take contraception, as people should be having children.

In my opinion unmarried people should not take contraception but if they want to I can't stop them and am not sure if anything will stop them in this community. (Married adolescent girl)

Well for us the Muslims, we believed that contraception is bad, so I will not support her, when you are not yet ready for married don't mix in such things, that's the advice I keep telling her. I will not support a boy for that, because this will motivate him to focus on womanizing and this will cause him to forget his education. (Father of unmarried adolescent girl)

In a couple cases, boys mentioned being asked questions if they try to buy condoms or try to access medication for STIs. Money can also be a challenge for boys. They then resort to alternative medicine for STIs.

Because I feel that when I go there they would say I'm too small to involve myself into sexual activities and that I'm not of the age to have sex or even when I, or maybe the doctor will ask what I'm going to do with the condom or even when I want to go and buy from the pharmacy maybe the physician will ask the same question, or sometime when I have those minor infections like gonorrhoea and I go to buy drug from the pharmacy the moment I say I want...there is this injection for gonorrhoea, the moment I say I want it they will ask, what are you going to do with this drug? These are all my fear and challenge that make me find it difficult to access it and sometimes it's the lack of money to, I sometime have these minor infections buy no money to buy drug to treat myself. My friends sometimes to drink enough palm wine so that I can urinate the infection out. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 15-18)

6.8 National policies, strategies and institutional capacities – CEFM

While there is law against child marriage in Sierra Leone, there is a difference of opinion on whether this law is adequately enforced, with some leaders saying that it is enforced, and others saying that deals are made so that there is no penalty.

[There are] no community by laws for child marriages...No government legal laws enforced in this community... Because the parents and the perpetrator will compromise and there is no penalty for those who compromise such issues. (Girl/woman leader)

They normally arrest the parent that gives their child for married, the police will also arrest those that attend the event and take them to the court and sometime they will go to jail. (Girl/woman leader)

There is also a difference in opinion on whether people are aware of this law or not, with some people saying they are aware, including given Fatima Bio's (Sierra Leone's first lady) work in this area.

Yes they discuss it over radio like Fatima Bio (first Lady) always says the girls belong to her it any one tough them especially men the individual most face the law so everybody knew the law in this community. (Female Religious Leader)

For some people, leaders note that the fear of breaking the law and being charged and fined is a deterrent to CEFM.

The parents and community people become scared that they do not want to become law breakers, so they are careful on this issue in our community. (Girl/woman leader)

The responses to what people will do if they see a child marriage happening varies across respondents, and is not consistent within groups of respondents. Some would report it to the authorities, including the parents, leaders, Family Support Unit (FSU), Save the Children, or the Ministry of Social Welfare worker.

On the other hand, some said that they would speak to the child, or to her parents, to try to convince them to change their minds.

Others would do nothing as they feel it is not their business, or they cannot do anything. There is also a concern that they will face backlash if they report.

Nothing because it is none of my business. (Married adolescent girl)

Report to who? When both parents and other elderly people have agreed upon, who is me to do such thing? I don't want to be hated or denied a land to farm because if they understand that I reported the problem all the chiefs will be against me in this community. (Partner of married adolescent girl)

Some do not know who to report to, as exemplified in the quotes below.

But don't have anywhere to complain except that I have met with you today maybe you will tell me to inform you anytime an early marriage is about to happen but besides that I have nowhere to go and complain, I'm a boy and I'm going to school. (Unmarried adolescent boy, 15-18)

My question is if I hear if a child who is under 18 getting married and I try to talk to them and they refuse and I also go and report to the police station and they take no action what should I do? (Unmarried adolescent boy, 15-18)

Leaders were also asked whether girls can stay in school if they are pregnant. They noted that girls can stay in school while pregnant (by law), but many are ashamed to do so.

To end teenage pregnancy our parents should prevent us from getting pregnant because if a girl gets pregnant she will be ashamed to go back to school. (Girl/woman leader)

Leaders were also asked if there are any supports for girls who are pregnant or girls who are young mothers; there is a lack of community-level support for girls who are pregnant or are young mothers.

7 Recommendations

The following are recommendations that Save the Children Canada, Burkina Faso and Sierra Leone may wish to consider based on this gender equality assessment.

Recommendation 1: Involve program participants in changing attitudes and behaviours regarding traditional gender norms and beliefs. The role of males as head of household, and primary decision-makers on many aspects of overall life (including CEFM), is deeply rooted in these communities. There is unequal distribution of chores, and care work continues to rest with girls and women. Traditional gender roles, where the primary role of the woman is to take care of the house and have children, and men get married to have a wife to take care of him and bear his children, leads to beliefs that girls do not have the right to follow their dreams, stay in school, seek meaningful work opportunities, or the right to control over their own bodies. These traditional gender norms also perpetuate myths that girls are at fault; that they need to “behave” and not be “asking for it” or they will end up pregnant and married before they are adults, as a result of “their own behaviour”. These myths also remove any responsibility of the male in being responsible for contraception and his role in the pregnancy. These myths also support the notion that women are not sexual, and should only take part in sex for the purpose of conceiving children (once married). Recommendation 6 further discusses SRHR. Engaging community members across different groups in a discussion on traditional gender roles, and working to shift awareness, attitudes and behaviours away from these traditional beliefs, including the traditional rationales for CEFM, will ultimately help to support reductions in CEFM.

Recommendation 2: Shift program participants’ attitudes from an instrumental rationale to include a human rights rationale for CEFM. Many respondents from across different groups note that a major negative implication of CEFM is the complications it causes when a girl gets pregnant and has a baby before she is physically mature (e.g. medical issues, operations during birth, potential harm to the baby). However, this rationale is an instrumental rationale, identifying health outcomes as the challenge, and reinforcing the ultimate female role of child bearer. As the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights states: “*There are two main rationales for a human rights-based approach: (a) the intrinsic rationale, acknowledging that a human rights-based approach is the right thing to do, morally or legally; and (b) the instrumental rationale, recognizing that a human rights-based approach leads to better and more sustainable human development outcomes. In practice, the reason for pursuing a human rights-based approach is usually a blend of these two*”.⁹ Hence, the current response for many in the communities who identify CEFM as a challenge hold this instrumental view, which does not adequately address the girl child as a person with rights, who should also have access to education, opportunities, and a right to choice over her own body, as the “right thing to do” from a moral and legal standpoint. Hence, a broader perspective on the intrinsic rationale and subsequent harms of CEFM should be included as part of the work done in the communities. Many of these perspectives are identified by the girls themselves during this assessment.

Recommendation 3: Increase awareness across all stakeholder groups on what constitutes forced marriage. As identified by UN Women, forced marriage “*can assume various forms and may occur in situations involving slavery; mail order marriages; human trafficking; arranged, traditional and customary marriages; expedient marriage; marriages as dispute*

⁹ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner For Human Rights. *Frequently Asked Questions on a Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Cooperation*. 2006; Available from: <https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/faqen.pdf>.

*settlement; fictitious marriages; trokosi (the practice of giving young virgin girls to priests to serve as sexual slaves as payment for services or as atonement), and; bride kidnapping or marriage to acquire citizenship”.*¹⁰ In some cases, forced marriage is still happening in Sierra Leone and Burkina Faso based on what respondents reported, given arranged, traditional and customary marriages and even kidnapping in some cases. There tends to be an understanding amongst some respondents that marrying a child because of pregnancy (or fear of pregnancy), even if the child agrees, is acceptable and is not considered forced marriage. There are also perceptions that a child is ready for marriage once she is menstruating and has breasts. But, as also noted by UN Women, “*As a child under the age of 18 is not capable of giving her valid consent to enter into marriage, child marriages are considered to be forced marriages*”⁶. More awareness needs to be raised across groups (including with girls, boys, parents, and religious leaders) with the message that girls under the age of 18 cannot make a decision to be married, and child marriage is in fact forced marriage. This can be accompanied by messaging across groups on the age of sexual consent for girls and boys (depending on the laws of the country, and given the age of their partner), to ensure people are aware of the age of sexual consent versus when engaging in sexual intercourse would instead be considered sexual assault. Work also needs to be done through awareness across different groups to address the lack of knowledge on where to report CEFM in some cases, as well sensitisation to address the fear of backlash for speaking out or taking action against CEFM (e.g. especially stopping a marriage).

Recommendation 4: Engage community champions, religious leaders, males, and females of all ages early on in the project to ensure buy-in. Changing attitudes and behaviors, including those rooted in long-standing tradition, customs, and religions, takes time. Engaging multiple groups from the start of the project, including engaging males of all ages (including fathers of adolescent girls) and women and men involved in the secret societies or other harmful traditions (e.g. giving girls as gifts in Sierra Leone, cossèguè in Burkina Faso), will be key to change. The involvement of religious leaders will be key to influencing change on traditional gender roles and CEFM, given the citations of religious texts or religion generally in the decisions on when a girl is mature (e.g. once she has breasts and starts to menstruate), and the fact that some religious leaders still officiate customary marriages since civil marriages are illegal. These are areas that will need to be changed with the assistance of religious leaders, and these leaders will need to be engaged early in the project to ensure buy-in. Having community champions, including males and religious leaders, will be important to the project’s success.

Recommendation 5: Address broader issues of poverty and education and their link to CEFM. CEFM is strongly linked to the broader determinants of health, including poverty and education, as illustrated in the quote below. Initiatives to shift overall gender norms across stakeholder groups including with girls, boys, parents, and community leaders (as per Recommendation 1) will help in encouraging girls to stay in school. The messaging by some of the girl respondents on what they may achieve if they are not married young (e.g. good jobs, high income, ability to economically contribute to the family and to their parents’ well-being) may be messaging that is helpful for other groups to understand, perhaps through intergenerational dialogues. Other interventions may include ensuring parents

¹⁰ UN Women. *Definition of forced and child marriage*. 2011; Available from: <https://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/614-definition-of-forced-and-child-marriage.html>.

support their girls to study through reduction of household chores. Initiatives to ensure that girls and their families can afford school fees for girls and other basic household needs (including nutrition for all members of the family), will help to ensure girls remain in school and that the girls do not seek early marriage on their own to escape their own family's poverty. This is especially the case as COVID-19 is expected to have a negative impact on CEFM with an increase in child marriage,¹¹ given that girls may be out of school due to the pandemic.

Once we have raised awareness by also showing the regulations on the subject, we need to take care of these children. Because if people give their children in marriage, it is because they do not always have the means to give them not only information on the sexual level, but also to take care of them on the school level and on other levels. So if there is an integrated care: school, health, food, it can reduce these cases. (Male local government leader, Burkina Faso)

Recommendation 6: Ensure accurate information on sexual and reproductive health and access to sexual and reproductive services without fear of shame or stigmatization. This work needs to be done with the girls themselves, as well as with current partners (if married) and parents of the girls (if unmarried). Work on addressing that contraceptives are not only the role of women (e.g. males use of condoms) is also needed, as well as messages on the importance of child spacing. Myths about contraceptive use need to be debunked, including the myth that contraceptive use increases promiscuity, and that all contraception has serious negative side effects for everyone. Addressing issues with healthcare workers on confidentiality also needs to be undertaken, which may include training and partnering with other organizations. For example, in Sierra Leone, working with Marie Stopes may be a key opportunity given the high level of awareness among respondents of their work (yet the challenge with being seen at the Marie Stopes vehicle would need to be addressed). This work on SRHR will help to ensure girls have control over their own bodies and can make their own informed decisions to decrease their risk of early pregnancy (and therefore decrease their risk of CEFM).

Recommendation 7: Ensure parents are supported in soft skills on parenting, and adolescents have communication skills to have discussions with their parents on difficult topics like CEFM. Skills courses on parenting adolescents, and on open communication between parents and adolescents, may be helpful to support parents and adolescents who may be faced with conflict or difficult situations at home. This may help encourage open dialogues between parents and children, encouraging children to discuss CEFM with their parents rather than accepting CEFM as they do not want to disobey their parents. This may also help alleviate situations where girls leave their home and marry early given difficult situations at home.

¹¹ UNICEF, *COVID-19: A threat to progress against child marriage*. 2021, UNICEF: New York.

Recommendation 8: Ensure supports for girls who are pregnant or are young mothers.

Once a girl is pregnant, or a young mother, supports need to be in place for her to ensure her well-being. This includes income generation activities, payment of school fees, and child minding services while she goes to school or work. Burkina Faso has a few groups working in these areas that Save the Children should connect with for potential partnership. In both countries, work with governments and local leaders can be done to ensure girls can stay in school even if pregnant or after giving birth, and that current government policies are followed (e.g. school attendance). This may include seeking financial support from the father of the baby. The project should work to address the current stigma of girls staying in school once pregnant or once given birth, including misconceptions that by having these girls in school, others will follow in her footsteps.

Recommendation 9: Balance open discussions on the topic of CEFM with enforcing legislation.

Both countries have laws in place against CEFM, yet CEFM is still taking place. As noted in the interviews and focus groups, some people still support CEFM for various reasons. The legislation that is in place, and the enforcement of this, is one tool to decrease CEFM. However, even as noted in collecting data for this gender equality assessment, there is fear in taking part in the project if people think they will be punished (e.g. for currently being married to a girl). Working with health and protection services on sensitization, wide engagement, and open and honest community discussions will be critical. Save the Children will want to ensure people are aware of the legislation in place (and the consequences including fines), coupled with the human rights rationales for ending CEFM. It will be important to ensure those delivering messages focus on change management in a diplomatic way, to ensure people do not feel fear of being reported, or shamed, as this may limit uptake of the interventions on CEFM. However, this needs to be balanced with the need to report CEFM if it is going to take place, and advocating for better application and enforcement of the legislation by governments. Hence, discussions will need to take place with Save the Children, other partners, and the local governments on these logistics, ensuring open dialogues while also protecting girls from CEFM. For mid-term and endline evaluations, if Photovoice is used again, instructions should be given to ensure that the girls do not take pictures of pregnant girls or young mothers as this may reinforce shame and fear. Ensuring girls get support and receive referrals (e.g. if they are experiencing gender based violence) is essential in the program and subsequent evaluations, and this work may be supported by girl and women's groups, as well as protection groups.

8 Conclusions

In both Sierra Leone and Burkina Faso, the man is typically viewed as the head of the household, making many of the decisions on sexual and reproductive health (including contraception), marriage of their offspring, and resource use.

Poverty is a strong driver of CEFM. Girls who are not in school, not doing well in school, or who are seen as taking part in risky “behaviours” (including going out at night, having sex with men, and getting pregnant) tend to be at greater risk of CEFM.

Both countries have customs, traditions, and religious practices that may encourage CEFM, including the belief that physical changes in a girl (puberty) mean she is ready for marriage. Pregnancy, and the fear of unmarried girl getting pregnant, is also a major influencer of CEFM. A

major negative result of CEFM is identified as complications in childbirth if the girl has babies too young.

Lack of information on sexual and reproductive health, including rumours of negative side effects and the shame associated with taking contraception before marriage, are challenges. The husband's control over contraception decisions is a challenge once married.

While legislation may be in place to make CEFM illegal in both countries, the enforcement of these laws is unevenly applied. Awareness of the law, and awareness of the challenges of CEFM, are not universal. Another issue is that child marriage is often not viewed as forced marriage if the child is viewed as making the decision (or being involved in the decision) to be married.

While some supports exist for girls in Burkina Faso who are pregnant or young mothers, fewer of these resources and organizations are identified in Sierra Leone. In both countries, ensuring pregnant girls and young mothers stay in school remains a challenge.

While attitudes and behaviours take time to change, the project has an opportunity to raise awareness and start to shift community members' thinking around CEFM, SRHR, and gender roles more broadly.

9 Appendix A: Data collection tools

The data collection tools are listed below and under separate cover:

1. Interview guide with adolescent married girls and their partners
2. Interview guide (aged 15-18) and FGD guide (aged 10-14) with unmarried adolescent girls (Photovoice)
3. Interview guide (aged 15-18) and FGD guide (aged 10-14) with unmarried adolescent boys
4. FGD guide with mothers and fathers of unmarried adolescent girls
5. Interview guide for leaders
6. Background information forms

10 Appendix B: Ethics forms

The following documents are under separate cover:

1. Consent and assent forms

- 1 Form A: Adolescent Assent Form (under 18 years)
- 2 Form B: Adult Consent Form (18 years or older)
- 3 Form C: Parents/Caregiver Consent Form (Giving Consent for their Children)

2. Confidentiality Agreement

3. Organizational Commitment Form

4. Template for Information and Services Sheet for Participants (Resource/Referral Form)